

Telecommuting Q & A

GENERAL

1. What is Telecommuting?

Telecommuting is the act of working at an alternative work location rather than physically travelling back and forth to a designated site. Essentially, telecommuters “commute” to work with telecommunications equipment rather than automobiles, typically one to two (1-2) days a week.

2. Is an employee entitled to Telecommuting as a work option?

No. Telecommuting is not considered a benefit or a right of an employee. It is the right of management to determine the positions that are appropriate for telecommuting and to determine whether to offer telecommuting to an individual.

3. What types of telecommuting arrangements may a Department/Agency consider for an employee?

- **Regular Out of Office Assignment**
Employees may be assigned to telecommute on a regular basis. This type of arrangement requires the Department/Agency to execute a Telecommuting Agreement and clearly define a telecommuting work plan for the employee.
- **Special Circumstances**
The employer and employee may agree on the need or desire to telecommute because of some special circumstance such as an office relocation or employee health requirement. These conditions will create a temporary telecommuting arrangement. A supervisor should review with the employee the work that needs to be completed, the resources the office will provide, and the length of the assignment.

4. Can Telecommuting be a substitute for primary dependent care?

No. The telecommuter should continue to utilize primary care arrangements as if working in the office.

5. What are the disadvantages of Telecommuting?

- Possible distractions at home
- Lack of telecommuter accessibility
- Limited opportunities for supervisory oversight

6. What are the benefits of Telecommuting?

- Increased work productivity
- Improved employee morale
- Reduced overhead and operational expenses of the employer
- Improved recruitment and retention of staff
- Improved ability to accommodate employee work schedules
- Improved organizational effectiveness
- Lowered pollution from auto emissions
- Reduced highway congestion
- Reduced fuel consumption

SAFETY & EQUIPMENT

1. Who is responsible for injuries that result from accidents at the telecommuting work site?

The employer is responsible as if the employee is reporting to a normal worksite. For this reason, telecommuting agreements should include a provision notifying the employee of the employer's right to inspect and approve telecommuting worksites.

2. Will Workers' Compensation cover accidents that occur at the telecommuting work site?

As an employee of the Commonwealth, Workers Compensation provides coverage and protection for work-related accidents and illnesses that occur within the scope of the employment contract, in this case, the telecommuting agreement. It is for this reason that the employer has the right to inspect and approve of the telecommuting worksite. Depending upon the telecommuting worksite, there may be instances where certain types of injuries may fall outside of the agreement. The Department/Agency should discuss these instances with employees.

3. What type of equipment may be required to facilitate telecommuting arrangements?

Depending upon the job requirements:

Hardware

- PC
- Modem
- Fax
- LAN
- Terminal Adapter
- Video

Software (packages)

- E-mail
- LAN
- Word processor
- Spreadsheet
- Miscellaneous: subject to job requirements

Communications

- Voice line
- Features
- Data line
- Fax line
- External text services
- Cellular phone
- Other phone
- Paging device
- Video

Mainframe Issues

- Hours of access
- Security

4. Who provides the equipment?

Either the employee or the Department/Agency may be responsible for providing equipment depending upon the telecommuting agreement and the employee's responsibilities.

5. Who is responsible for maintenance?

A maintenance plan should be implemented with the telecommuting agreement. The Department/Agency will not be responsible for the cost of utilities or home maintenance. The Department/Agency, however, may reimburse the telecommuter for business related long-distance phone calls. Office supplies should be procured in the usual office manner.

6. Can State-owned equipment and software be used for personal purposes?

No. The Commonwealth/Department/Agency's policies on personal use of State resources also apply to the home office or telecenter. The telecommuting agreement should include such a provision.

7. What about security of information?

Telecommuters will follow the security procedures established by the Information Technology Division. Advanced authorization is required for restricted access materials and data.

TRAVEL

1. Does the State pay travel for when the telecommuter must come to the regular office?

No. Telecommuters are responsible for their own means of getting to and from their assigned office.

2. Does the telecommuter have to work at home all the time?

No. The Department/Agency will determine which tasks are best accomplished at home and which tasks require the telecommuter to come into the office.

2. What kind of work schedule is used?

The Department/Agency and the telecommuter will arrange a work schedule that will meet the needs of the Department/Agency as well as allow the telecommuter to achieve his/her work objectives.

3. Are there any changes in pay or benefits?

No. A telecommuting arrangement should only effect an employee's work location and not the amount of pay or type of benefits he/she receives.

4. What about taxes?

Tax benefits may exist for employees who maintain a home office. Employees are encouraged to refer to their tax consultants for further information.

5. Does telecommuting affect the employee's opportunity for promotions or transfers?

No. Telecommuters are entitled to the same consideration as non-telecommuters with respect to promotions and transfers.

PROCESS OVERVIEW AND SELECTION

1. What steps must a Department/Agency take in implementing a telecommuting arrangement?

- Appoint a Coordinator to oversee the program
- Select positions, within suitable job classifications, appropriate for telecommuting
- Conduct an orientation with supervisors and potential telecommuters
- Execute an agreement for telecommuting employees and their supervisors
- Follow-up with participants through periodic training on telecommuting skills
- Periodically survey telecommuters and supervisors for their assessments of the program

2. What job classifications could a Department/Agency consider for telecommuting?

Some classifications potentially eligible for a telecommuting arrangement include:

- Accountant
- Administrative Assistant
- Appraiser
- Auditor
- Consultant
- Contract Monitor
- Data Entry Clerk
- Economist
- Engineer
- Financial Analyst
- Programmer
- Researcher
- Systems Analyst
- Training Designer
- Writer

Other job classifications may also be appropriate for a telecommuting arrangement. One determining factor will include whether the position requires a heightened level of supervision, or regular face-to-face contact with co-workers or clients.

3. What characteristics should a Department/Agency consider in selecting an employee for telecommuting?

Some characteristics to consider for a telecommuting arrangement include:

- Self-motivation

- Successful performance evaluations
- History of dependability
- Ability to function independent of direct supervision
- Ability to deal with isolation
- Well organized with good time management skills
- Has an appropriate home work site that lacks possible distractions
- Has an adequate level of job skills and knowledge
- Prefers the home environment
- Moderately people oriented
- Proven good work habits

4. What characteristics should a Department/Agency consider in selecting a supervisor for telecommuting employee(s)?

The person selected to be a supervisor:

- Must believe telecommuting can work
- Be willing to develop realistic performance goals for the telecommuter(s)
- Be willing to provide supervisory support and involvement
- Be able to adapt management styles in providing effective guidance to out of the office employees
- Possess good management and communication skills

5. Are there additional benefits available to telecommuters?

No. Telecommuters should be treated no differently than non-telecommuters with respect to benefits or rights.

6. Are telecommuters evaluated differently than regular office employees?

No. Telecommuters and non-telecommuters are evaluated by their performance based on individually established work plans according to their positions and responsibilities.